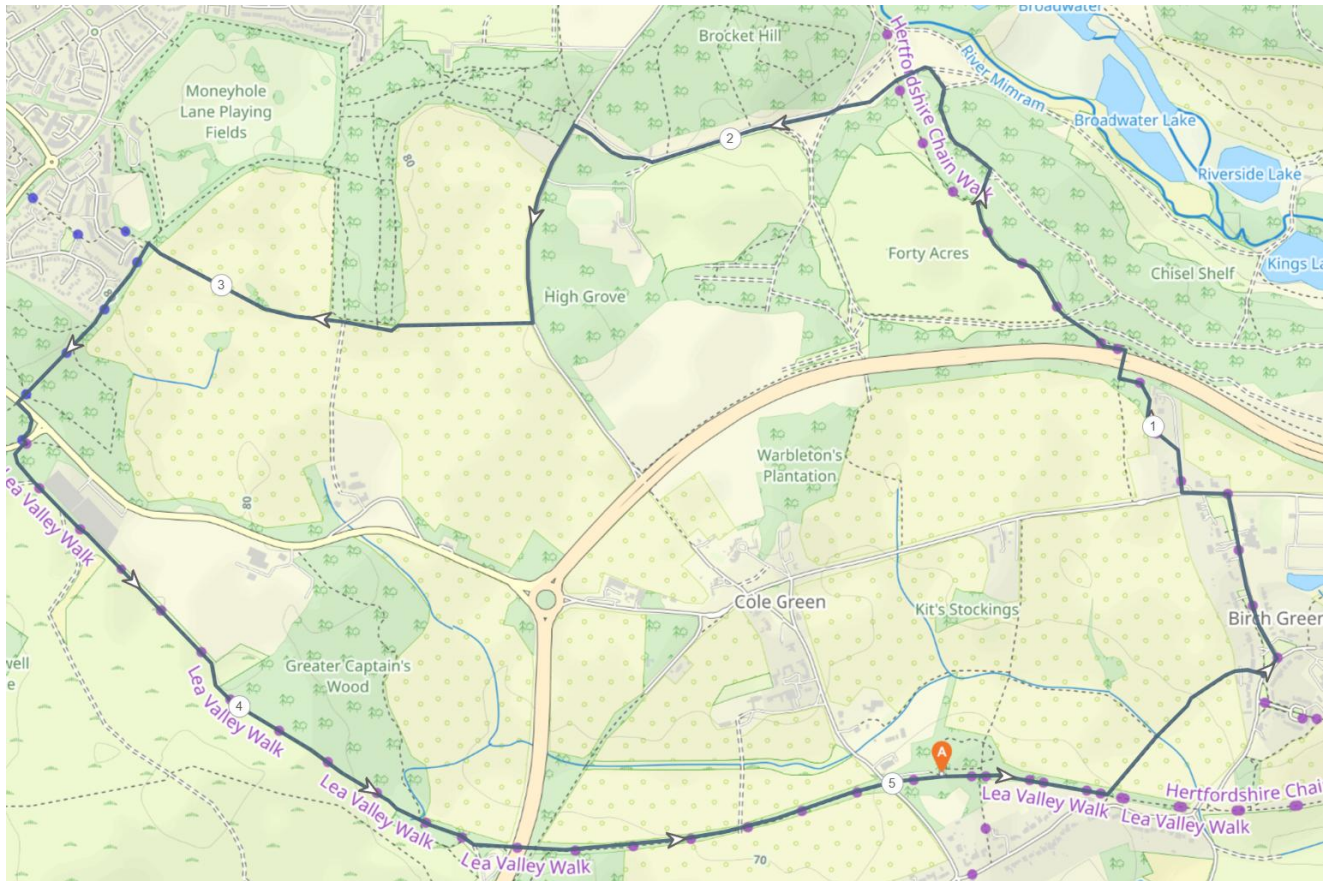




The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Cole Green Way and Panshanger Park



This 5 mile walk explores Green Belt countryside in East Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield Districts, to the east of Welwyn Garden City. It passes Birchall Wood where there are lovely bluebells, takes in part of the Cole Green Way which occupies the route of the former Hertford and Welwyn Junction railway, and visits Panshanger Park, reopened to the public after extensive gravel extraction.

Distance: 5 miles / 8.1 km

Ascent: 180 feet / 55 metres

Duration: 2 hours

Difficulty: Easy (there is one stile)

Start / finish: the Cole Green Way car park between Cole Green and Letty Green.
(What3words: sculpture.awake.bumps)

Refreshments: The Cowper Arms pub near the start & finish of the walk

Start the walk at the Cole Green Way car park between Cole Green and Letty Green, south of the A414 between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford.

The turning for the car park and picnic area is next to the Cowper Arms pub and adjacent to the former railway bridge.



From the Cole Green Way car park and picnic area turn left to go east along the former railway.



The Hertford and Welwyn Junction railway operated a passenger service from 1858 until 1951. The railway continued as a goods line and was used by trains bringing London's refuse to nearby landfill sites until the 1960s. Today it is owned by the County Council and managed by its rural estates team, providing a popular walking, running and cycling route which is also a valuable wildlife corridor.

Continue for 400 yards, then turn left to walk between two fence posts onto a footpath which heads to the northeast towards Birch Green in the distance.

The path runs down into a small valley, and keeps left of the hedge up the other side.



When you reach Birch Green keep going between the houses, then turn left to head approximately north along the main street in the village, passing the school on the right and the war memorial on the left.

Turn left at the T-junction.

You are now on the route of one of the Chain Walks devised by the East Herts Footpath Society in the 1980s. The 15 linked circular walks through rural east Hertfordshire have sadly lost their waymarking, but are shown on Ordnance Survey maps.



After approximately 100 yards turn right onto public footpath 10 signposted 'Poplars Green ¼' (this should read '1¼') and take the path with a white weatherboarded cottage on the left and a pond to the right.

Go through the kissing gate to the right of the gate marked 'Beechleigh'



Almost immediately take the path to the left diagonally across the grass to the far corner.

Go through the gap in the hedge and over the stile, then turn right along the path running through dense vegetation.

Turn left, keeping the close boarded fence on your right. Then turn right to go over the footbridge crossing the A414.



At the far side of the bridge turn left and continue along the path through more dense vegetation.

When you reach the gate go straight over the track beyond and through the gap in the far fence.

Keep ahead with the woodland on your right and restored gravel workings on your left.



You are now in the former Panshanger Estate, once part of an extensive network of estates along the Mimram owned by the Cowper family. At one time the family lived in a house at Cole Green (now disappeared), where Lancelot 'Capability' Brown advised on landscaping the park. Later they moved across the valley to a new house built at Panshanger in the first decade of the 19th century.

Like many estates, Panshanger declined in the 20th century. No male heirs survived (two sons were killed in the First World War and a third in a later car crash) and of the 4,000 acres sold from the estate in 1919 nearly half of the area was acquired for the new Welwyn Garden City. The rest of the estate was sold and the house subsequently demolished in the 1950s. In the early 1980s planning permission for gravel extraction was granted on condition that a 1000-acre country park with full public access would be the eventual legacy. Mineral extraction finished at the end of 2017 and full public access is now available in the Country Park.

In about 400 yards turn right onto the path which runs into the woodland. You have now crossed into the Country Park area.

When you reach the wide ride running through the woodland, turn left to follow the ride which eventually turns to the right.



Go downhill to reach the edge of the woodland. You will now be looking over the valley of the river Mimram to rising land on the far side of the river. In the base of the valley is a lake created alongside the river: this is the Broadwater.

You could deviate from the route described at this point to explore more of the Country Park. Be sure to return to this viewpoint to resume the route described.



Humphry Repton (1752 - 1818) was engaged to create a new design for Cole Green and Panshanger parks together and by 1799 there were 60 labourers at work digging out the base of the new lake, the Broadwater, alongside the Mimram. The landscape designer is famous for his Red Books, which set out his ideas for a designed landscape, complete with folding pages opening out to reveal his vision. The one for Panshanger is in the care of the county's archives in Hertford. As well as creating the new lake, Repton's plans included planting of thousands of trees. The end result was described as 'one of the finest parks in Hertfordshire' in its heyday.

To resume the walk, turn left at the waymark sign to follow the path running along the edge of the woodland and above the grassland of the valley floor.



On the left, you will pass a route marker for 'Butterfield Way'.



Continue along the valley towards the Panshanger Park car park, which opened in October 2025.

Keep to the right of the car park, walking along the road with grassland to the left and woodland with mature trees to the right.

Eventually you reach a kissing gate at the exit from the park onto Panshanger Lane.



Turn left and walk in a southerly direction alongside the road for approximately one third of a mile until you reach a large clump of holly on the right-hand side of the road.

Take the public footpath heading east from here towards Welwyn Garden City, with a hedge on the right. After a short distance the footpath runs along a green track between hedges before continuing alongside arable fields towards the southern end of Birchall Wood.



Continue along the path through the edge of Birchall Wood, which is a sea of bluebells in spring, passing old hornbeam trees along the woodland boundary.

After passing through the gap in the trees ahead, turn left to follow the footpath that skirts the eastern edge of Welwyn Garden City.



Go through the pedestrian barrier at the end of the lane, cross the road and turn left on the far pavement.

Bear right onto Cole Green Lane, cross the road and go through the entrance onto the Cole Green Way.



This path runs all the way back to the car park where you started. It passes former gravel workings restored to grassland on the right, and land still being restored to the left. It also provides views out over the upper Lea Valley to the right, before going downhill through a tunnel under the A414. The final half mile of the walk is quiet and sheltered, with views out over the surrounding countryside towards Letty Green.



This route last walked by CPRE in November 2025.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and promote the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone. For more information on our work, or to sign up for our newsletter, make a donation, or volunteer with us, please visit www.cpreherts.org.uk

CPRE Hertfordshire is a registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel 01438 717587.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.